DIGITAL MD:

A NOVEL UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL SCHOOL ELECTIVE

FOR SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL SCHOLARSHIP

by

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

Seventy-five percent of medical students are using social media to engage with colleagues and patients. The current medical curriculum lacks coursework to support student doctors in such digital scholarship and to educate them about the importance of patient confidentiality, online professionalism, and using social media as part of their careers. Furthermore, many medical schools implement restrictive policies without formal mentorship or curriculum to foster professional and successful social media engagement. This starkly contrasts the rest of the practice of medicine, which is built upon structured mentorship and reflective practice. To that end, students at our medical school identified a need for a structured mentorship experience that incorporates strategies for professional social media communication and digital scholarship creation.

Methods

The Digital MD curriculum was formulated based on student survey, pre-existing materials, and discussion with key stakeholders (physicians, campus digital media, national social media leaders). We recruited first- and second-year medical students to participate in a 7-week elective, during which they engaged in live didactic sessions and small group discussions while completing a tiered series of asynchronous exercises to gain comfort and skills in digital literacy. Students were assessed with an assessment map and course assignments for each of the modules. Speakers included physicians who had integrated social media into their teaching, advocacy, and public health

portfolios, as well as members of the campus social media department and faculty with social media presence. Throughout the course, students used Adobe Creative Cloud and strategies learned in class to create a digital media capstone project.

Results

Over a period of two academic years, we enrolled 9 undergraduate medical students. We evaluated students' attitudes and knowledge with a multiple choice and free text survey taken before and after the course. Following the course, 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to define concepts of social media and digital scholarship, understood the role of advocacy, and found the course made them more likely to engage in social media and digital scholarship.

Conclusions

We demonstrated the feasibility of an undergraduate medical student elective on social media and digital scholarship. Through this initiative, we also addressed a curricular gap identified through needs assessment. Survey data suggests that social media is an important and increasingly critical part of communication and professionalism in the profession of medicine, and that resources in digital scholarship are available, expanding, and proven to be feasible. Overall, Digital MD brings unique value to students through the creation of capstone projects and enhanced social media engagement with real world impact.